

THE STORY OF
KALIDAS

H.D. Bhatt Shailesh



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Dr. H.D. Bhatt 'Shailesh'



Publications Division
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India

First Edition - December 1992 (*Pausa 1914*)
Second Edition - 2003 (*Saka 1924*)

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ISBN : 81-230-1084-2

Price : Rs. 42.00

Published by the Director, Publications Division,
Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India,
Patiala House, New Delhi-110001.

Sales Emporia • Publications Division

- Patiala House, Tilak Marg, New Delhi - 110 001
- Super Bazar, Connaught Circus, New Delhi - 110 001
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- C/o PIB, 80, Malviya Nagar, Bhopal- 462 003 (M.P.)
- C/o PIB, B-7/B, Bhawani Singh Road, Jaipur - 302 001

Printed at : Akashdeep Printers, 20, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-2.

Preface

It is strange that the Indian scholars have not so far been unanimous in their opinion about the birth place of Kalidas. This has been a debatable and controversial issue, even though all his literary works go on to establish the fact that Garhwal is the birth place of this noble and immortal soul of India.

His birth place is said to be a place called 'Asam' originally known as "Ashram", on the banks of river Mandakini, below Guptakashi near the present Vidyapeeth in Chamoli. Flanked by the historically important Ukhimath on one side and the prestigious 'Sidhpeeth' at Kalimath and facing the most fascinating snow-capped peaks of Chaukhamba, Guptakashi had been an ancient seat of learning.

In fact, the intensity of feeling, attachment and devotion which Kalidas had displayed while describing the splendour, glory and charm of Mandakini, go on to prove how intimately Kalidas was connected with this valley and how enamoured and fond he grew of it. All his literary works abound in allusions to Mandakini here and there. In his Meghdoot he wrote, "In the cool tranquil waters of Mandakini, village damsels are seen playing hide and seek under shady groves and trying to ward off heat by splashing water at each other. Their captivating physical charm is successful in drawing the attention of, and even tempting gods." Likewise in Kumarsambhava he states, "On the sandy banks of Mandakini, Parvati is preoccupied with either adorning dolls or playing with her playmates. "Kartikeya on reaching the banks of Mandakini - the river, even adored and revered by gods, lay prostrate respectfully before her and folding hands like a true devout, greeted and worshipped her."

These frequent references in his masterpieces to Mandakini, Kalimath, etc., establish beyond doubt that Kalidas was associated very intimately with this valley right from his birth.

The name Kalidas is another strong evidence in this connection as in Garhwali language the word Kalee is pronounced as Kali. The last long vowel remains unstressed in Garhwali and hence the name acquired by the great poet. It is also said that on setting for Kalimath from his native village he was blessed with the gift of speech and as a consequence by virtue of being patronised by goddess Kali, he came to be known as Kalidas. It is said that whenever he hummed a tune, it used to cast a magic spell on all the old and young alike. For hours together he would sit outside Kalimath or move around the hills and near the banks of Kaliganga, a tributary of Mandakini. On the outskirts of the village was a colony of singers and song composers who used to earn a living by putting up song and dance performances. In the same colony, there used to live a girl called Parvati - an epitome of beauty and in possession of all the captivating feminine charms.

On catching sight of the girl Kalidas fell in love with her - evidently a case of love at first sight. Parvati too responded to his call of love and was heard humming his songs very often. Suddenly Parvati disappeared, and he had to face disappointment and frustration of his life's dream. He travelled far and wide covering long distances which took him to Alka, Banks of Malini, Kashi, Kashmir, Ujjain, Bengal, Rameshwaram and Srilanka. Little wonder, if all these places started staking claim for being his birthplace. That is why, Prof. Laxmi Dhar Kalla claims that Kashmir was his birth place, whereas, Shri Hari Prasad Shastri names Vidisha, Dr. A.N. Jha, Bihar, Dr. Jagdish Chandra Mathur, Sirsa and Dr. Vasudev Vishnu, Ujjain, as his birth place. But his literary works are replete with evidences and legends which prove Garhwal to be his birth place. Whether it is Kumarsambhava or Raghuvansh, Meghdoot, Abhigyanshakuntalam or Vikram Urvasiyam, all

describe vividly the folk dances, life style, marriage ceremony etc. of Garhwal. In fact, Himalayas had been his heart beats.

"The story of Kalidas" will give an idea and a picture of Kalidas for all, in a very simple language.

Kalidas was a great Sanskrit *Kavi* in ancient times. In Sanskrit *Kavi* means one who possesses super intellectual knowledge capable of seeing the reality by vision and illumination.

H.D. Bhatt 'Shailesh'

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LIFE SKETCH

1. Birth

Dharmanand and his wife lived in a beautiful village in the lap of the Himalayas. They were poor and pious farmers. They used to work hard in their fields. They had everything for their needs. Their house was full with bags of grain. They had abundance of milk, butter and honey. They had land and cattle.

They nursed only one secret sorrow. They had no son. They were getting old. Their only desire was to have a son who would be their comfort and support in the hour of need. Dharmanand and his wife felt very unhappy when they saw children playing and laughing in the homes of their neighbours. They daily prayed God to bless them with a son. They visited many holy places and sought blessings from holy men. Alas! no child was born to them.

Once a holy man visited the village where Dharmanand lived. Dharmanand went to the holy man to pay his respects. Dharmanand prostrated before the holy man and touching his feet, said, "I am very unhappy. I am getting old but have no son. Kindly bless me that I may have a son." The holy man looked at Dharmanand with his penetrating eyes, thought over his prayer and said, "Go, worship Mother Kali. She will very soon bless you with a beautiful child." Dharmanand went home glad at heart and told his wife what had happened.

In obedience to the instructions of the holy man, Dharmanand and his wife worshipped Mother Kali. They prayed in temples and observed fast on the *navratris* and other auspicious days. One night, Dharmanand had a dream that a

beautiful baby was born to them, but it was forcibly taken away by an ascetic. Dharmanand woke up much distraught. The dream weighed heavily on his mind.

The blessings of the holy man bore fruit and a son was born to them. The happiness of Dharmanand and his wife knew no bounds. The baby was named Kalidas because they considered him a divine gift from Mother Kali.

2. Childhood

Dharmanand and his wife were happy at the birth of Kalidas. Four years passed joyfully and Dharmanand had forgotten his dreadful dream. One day a fearsome looking ascetic came to the village. He caught hold of Kalidas's hand and did not let the boy go. Dharmanand was much frightened and pleaded with him to let the boy alone, but it was of no avail.

All the villagers gathered at the house of Dharmanand and entreated the ascetic to free the child, but he would not agree. After a long argument, he agreed to accept a gift of grains for setting the boy free. Dharmanand was much pained by this incident and fell seriously ill. Soon afterwards he died. Three days after the death of Dharmanand, his wife also passed away.

At the age of four, Kalidas was an orphan. He was left all alone in the world without the love and care of parents. Out of compassion, the headman of the village took Kalidas to his home. Kalidas began to live under the protection of the village headman.

3. The Prophecy

One day, a *mahatma* well known for his supernatural powers, came to the village. Men, women and children visited him to pay their respects. They were very happy to receive his blessings. Kalidas was also there, standing a little away from the crowd. Sadness was writ large on his face as he was an

orphan deprived of the love and affection of his parents. The *mahatma* saw him and went up to him.

"My son," said the *mahatma*, "why are you sad?"

Kalidas did not say a word in reply.

The *mahatma* took Kalidas's palm in his hand and read the lines.

"Don't be sad and miserable." the *mahatma* advised Kalidas. "May Mother Kali bless you! Go, play and be happy, for, one day you will be king."

Many in the congregation laughed at his words; some were taken by surprise and a few shook their heads as if to say that the ways of God are inscrutable. The *mahatma* continued, "Your royal bride will have a black mole on her left cheek, just as you have. The day you meet her, your bad days will be over and your life will be lit up."

4. Love and Sorrow

Kalidas grew up to be a handsome young boy. He had sharp features, a loveable face and a golden voice. He was very fond of singing. He used to sit by the bank of the village stream and sing for hours. The melody and sweetness of his voice enchanted the listeners and they collected round him to hear him sing. Even the birds and the animals of the forest were attracted by his melodious voice and gathered round him. He became much popular and his fame as a singer spread far and wide. The villagers praised him much and out of affection called him *Kavi*—the poet.

Parvati, the daughter of the village headman, fell in love with Kalidas. Parvati confided in her mother, her love for Kalidas. Parvati's mother was very happy to know it, as she too had become fond of Kalidas. Kalidas also loved Parvati and they could not bear to live away from each other. Parvati's

mother took both of them to a temple where they were married. They were madly in love with each other and spent their days happily.

Once a gang of dacoits raided the village where Kalidas lived. They kidnapped Parvati. The tragic incident caused much sorrow to Kalidas who could not bear to live without Parvati. He was very unhappy and became distraught with grief. There was no one in the village to comfort him and he found in his life nothing but darkness and gloom.

By now Kalidas had become very famous as a poet and his well-wishers and friends suggested him to travel around the country to forget his sorrow. Kalidas readily accepted their suggestion. He left his ancestral village and went on a journey to seek peace and happiness..

5. The Royal Bride

Wandering from place to place, Kalidas arrived at the court of King Vikramaditya. The *Raja* had heard about Kalidas and was glad to receive the poet of great fame in his court. Kalidas spent some years in the court of Vikramaditya and the *Raja* granted him the title of '*Raj Kavi*'—the poet laureate.

Raja Vikramaditya's only daughter "Ratnawali", fell in love with Kalidas. Though Kalidas enjoyed all worldly comforts, honour and riches at the court of the *Raja*, he was forlorn and sad. He always thought of Parvati his wife who had been kidnapped by dacoits.

Princess Ratnawali asked Kalidas many a times to compose gay and humorous songs but Kalidas always composed sorrowful ones. He longed and languished for Parvati. Kalidas requested the *Raja* to send his soldiers to every nook and corner of the country in search of Parvati. The *Raja* granted his request. His soldiers searched the four corners of the land but to no avail.

Princess Ratnawali sympathised with Kalidas in his sorrow and avowed her true love for him. In this way, about four years passed but Princess Ratnawali remained steadfast in her love.

At last Kalidas consented to marry her. They were married with royal pomp and show. Kalidas was made the Raja of Kashmir and assumed the title of "*Matrigupta*".

6. The Soul's Cry

After his marriage with Princess Ratnawali, Kalidas left the court of Vikramaditya and came to Kashmir with his royal bride.

Kalidas still cherished the sweet and loving memory of Parvati. His heart was neither in the affairs of his kingdom nor in his life at home. Even as a king, he did not find peace of mind and remained grief-stricken. Day and night Parvati's image danced before his eyes. Sometimes he would cry in anguish, "Oh Parvati! My Parvati, come to me."

Ratnawali tried her best to comfort him but did not succeed. Kalidas could not forget Parvati. He had scant regard for the luxury of his palace. He cared little for the royal pomp and show. He wore ordinary clothes, took plain food and spent almost all his time in composing poetry. He used to go to the woods and spend his time on mountain tops, singing his love to Parvati.

The birds of the forest would gather and flutter round him. Often, he would thus address them: "Ye, birds of the sky who know no sorrow! Go and find my Parvati; Tell her I am languishing in her separation."

Ratnawali, the royal bride, was sick of the queer behaviour of her husband. She could not understand him nor his love for Parvati.

As time passed, Kalidas completely neglected the affairs of his kingdom and even gave up living in the palace.

It was very hard for Ratnawali. She loved Kalidas with all her heart. She was heart-broken at his uncommon behaviour and soon passed away in grief.

After the death of Ratnawali, Kalidas renounced his kingdom and once again went on a long journey.

7. Wanderings

After giving up his kingdom, Kalidas wandered from place to place in search of Parvati.

He had no fixed abode and was indifferent to worldly desires. He composed songs in praise of Nature, Love and Beauty. The villagers always helped and offered their hospitality to him. He worked only when he fancied or needed food.

As Kalidas was born a worshipper of Nature, endowed with pure passion and poetical imagination, the villagers were delighted with his conversation, pleased by his manners and spell-bound by his lyrical voice. As time passed, his fame spread far and wide.

Wandering from place to place, Kalidas spent many years in search of Parvati but could not find her.

There are many legends connected with Kalidas. A few interesting and widely known ones are given in the following pages.

8. The Princess of Kashi

In ancient India, people aspired to achieve cultural refinement through learning. Sanskrit was the lingua franca and mastery of the language was considered a great achievement, sign of culture and an attribute of nobility. During those days, people cared little for wealth and moral values were held in high esteem.

Kashi was then a renowned seat of learning. Vidyottama, the princess of Kashi, was a great scholar, well versed in Sanskrit language and literature and Vedic philosophy. Many were the suitors of this charming and cultured princess who was thought to be an embodiment of goddess Saraswati.

According to the custom of those days, she had stipulated a condition for her marriage. It was that she would marry a man who would defeat her in a philosophical debate.

The graceful Princess Vidyottama was a prodigy of learning. None of her suitors could defeat her in a debate. They were not learned enough to answer her questions correctly. As a result, the princess could not find a suitable match for herself.

9. The King's Proclamation

An ancient custom enjoined upon fathers not to delay the marriage of their daughters. The king of Kashi, father of Princess Vidyottama, was very unhappy when he could not find a suitable groom for his daughter.

One day the King thought of a plan and proclaimed that whoever defeated his daughter in a debate would get half his kingdom, besides his daughter's hand in marriage. The King thought that an offer of half his kingdom would bring, from far and near, many deserving suitors to claim the hand of the princess. His plan worked.

Many learned princess from far and near, big and small, came to match their wits against those of the Princess Vidyottama but failed. Many men of letters were put to shame by the defeat they suffered.

All were humbled and none succeeded in winning the princess and the promised share of the kingdom.

10. The Dumb Debate

The defeated suitors thought that the princess was very conceited. They conspired to defeat the princess by trickery and get

her married to someone utterly unworthy of her. This way, they wanted to avenge their defeat.

By that time, Kalidas's travels had taken him to Kashi. One day he was chopping wood from a tree when some persons approached him and after a discussion took him to a palatial house. He was entertained there for a few days. They told Kalidas that he would be married to the Princess of Kashi if he followed their instructions and played dumb.

A day was fixed for the debate between the princess and Kalidas. Surrounded by the conspirators, Kalidas came to the court and was presented as the Guru who had taken a vow of silence for a year. A panel of three judges was selected and it was stipulated that the princess would ask only three questions by making signs and they would, in turn, be answered by gestures by Kalidas. If the first two questions were correctly answered, the third would not be asked.

Then the debate began. The princess raised one finger, indicating thereby that God (i.e. Brahma) is one who created Man. Kalidas thought the princess wanted to destroy his one eye. He raised two fingers to show that he would destroy both her eyes. The judges declared that the answer was correctly given as both Brahma and the Maya created Man.

Vidyottama asked the second question by raising her five fingers conveying the idea that Man is made of five elements. To this question, Kalidas replied by showing his clenched fist. He thought that the princess wanted to slap him. In order to show her that he was not a weak man, he raised his clenched fist. The judges concluded that Kalidas meant to say that the five elements create Man, only in combination and not singly. They declared Kalidas the winner and that the princess had lost the debate.

Kalidas was married to the charming Princess of Kashi. He began to spend his time in Kashi as a dumb man and his wanderings came to an end.

One night, when it was all quiet and calm, some noise was heard. Vidyottama asked Kalidas what it was. Kalidas forgot that he was to play dumb for some more months and replied that it was the sound made by a camel.

All at once the princess realised that Kalidas was not dumb and she was deceived by the conspiracy of her defeated suitors. She was in a fit of rage. There and then she turned Kalidas out of her palace. Kalidas was once again on the road.

11. The Miracle

When Princess Vidyottama turned him out of the palace, Kalidas had nowhere to go. He took to the street once again and resumed his wanderings. He used to go from village to village singing his self-composed songs in praise of Nature, Love and Beauty. He passed his days on the hospitality of the villagers.

Once he was going to some village, through a deep forest. When he was in the middle of the forest, he was caught by a gang of *sadhus* who were worshippers of the goddess Kali. The *sadhus* were in search of a man for sacrificing him to the goddess. They took Kalidas to a temple. Kalidas pleaded for his life but the *sadhus* did not heed his entreaties.

They made him lie down on the floor in front of the black stone image of the goddess. As one of the *sadhus* lifted his dagger to behead Kalidas, the idol fell down. It was a bad omen. The *sadhus* were frightened and ran away leaving him in the temple. Thus the life of Kalidas was saved.

After some time, Kalidas composed himself and rose from the ground. Out of fear he had lost his voice and could not speak. Kalidas was now a dumb man indeed. He left the temple and resumed his wanderings but his suffering was great as he could sing no more. He was the most unhappy man as it was in singing alone he found the joy of living.

12. The Princess of Bengal

During those days, King Vikram ruled Bengal. He had a beautiful daughter called Padmini. Princess Padmini and Vidyasagar, the King's Prime Minister's son, were fast friends. They used to study and play together.

One day Vidyasagar asked Padmini whom she would marry, when she grew up.

Padmini replied she would marry some handsome prince.

Vidyasagar took it ill and was much annoyed with Padmini. He expected the princess to marry him as they were friends.

At the age of 18, Padmini was a graceful maiden. Her father wanted to get her married at that age as was the custom among the people of ancient India. He took his Prime Minister into confidence and asked him to look for a suitable match for his daughter. The Prime Minister, in turn, asked his son, Vidyasagar, to help him in the matter.

Vidyasagar was mean and wicked by nature. He found it a good opportunity for taking revenge upon the princess. He assured his father that he would visit different kingdoms for selecting a suitable match for the princess.

Vidyasagar pretended to go on a journey. He remained absent from his home for many days. One day he met Kalidas. Though in poor circumstances, Kalidas was a handsome man. Vidyasagar wanted to talk to him but soon found that he was dumb.

Vidyasagar brought Kalidas to his house and by means of signs asked Kalidas not to make any noise.

He said to his father, "Here is the Prince of Kashmir. He is in disguise and has been observing a vow of silence. He is a suitable match for the princess."

After a few days, Kalidas was properly attired and presented before the King of Bengal. Kalidas's vow of silence was easily

explained away. The king and his courtiers liked Kalidas very much and an auspicious day was fixed for the marriage. Vidyasagar took great pains to look after the dumb Kalidas, lest the secret should leak out before the day of marriage.

The day of marriage dawned amidst the rejoicings of the people and the royal family. The wedding ceremony was performed with great pomp and show.

That night the maid-servant ushered Kalidas into the royal bridal chamber. Kalidas was astonished to find himself in the luxurious room. Bewildered and alone, he lay down on the bed and was soon fast asleep.

When the princess came there, she found Kalidas snoring. She shook him violently. The baffled Kalidas found himself numb in the presence of the princess.

Padmini soon found that Kalidas was a dumb rustic, uncultured and uncouth. She then realised that Vidyasagar had played a dirty trick on her to avenge himself.

Padmini was much annoyed and turned Kalidas out of her palace. He once more took to the road.

13. The Great Awakening

When Kalidas came out of Padmini's palace, he had nowhere to go. He remembered the temple of Mother Kali in the forest and headed for it. It was the same forest where he had met Vidyasagar. He decided to live in the temple and earn his living by picking and selling firewood.

Kalidas made his abode in the temple. In his heart, he suffered untold anguish because he could sing no more. He spent his time in keeping the temple neat and tidy and offering silent prayer to Mother Kali. He made up his mind not to move from village to village but spend the rest of his days in the quietude of the temple.

One day some *mahatmas* came to stay at the temple. Kalidas served them devotedly. They were pleased with his sincere service and were very much moved seeing the pitiable condition of Kalidas. They gave him lessons on meditation and contemplation' and taught him some yogic exercises. After some days, they went their way.

Kalidas spent many years of his life in the temple, meditating and worshipping Mother Kali. At long last, the goddess bestowed her grace upon him and awakened the great knowledge lying dormant in him. Miraculously Kalidas was transformed into a man of enlightenment, with his voice regained.

He sang in ecstasy and in adoration of the Mother. The birds and the animals of the forest heard him sing and gathered round him; such was the melody, lilt and the magical quality of his new-found voice.

14. How Classics were Born

Night had fallen on the city of Kashi. People were fast asleep in their homes, but Princess Vidyottama was tossing about in her bed. She could not sleep. She thought about her past life—the tragic incident of her marriage and turning Kalidas out of her palace.

Though many years had passed, yet Vidyottama had not forgotten the conspiracy of her dejected suitors and her marriage to Kalidas through deceit and trickery.

Suddenly, there was a knock on her door.

"Who is there?" asked the princess.

"Kalidas," the voice replied.

Vidyottama now asked him in Sanskrit whether he had attained some knowledge of the Sanskrit language.

It is believed by some that Kalidas recited on the spot the three greatest classics of the Sanskrit literature

namely Kumarsambhav, Meghdoot and Raghuvansh.

This way, Kalidas redeemed his honour.

15. The Evening of Life

Kalidas had now grown old. His fame as a poet and man of wisdom had spread far and wide. When he sang, he attracted people from the nearby villages to the temple and they stood there spellbound, listening to his glorious songs. It was a common sight to see birds fluttering over him and the wild beasts sitting around quietly. In the temple of Mother Kali, among his strange audience of men, birds and animals, Kalidas looked like a being from the other world.

Padmini, the Princess of Bengal, heard the marvels of Kalidas. One day, she too came there to hear Kalidas sing. She could not restrain herself and fell at his feet crying.

"May you be happy and free of sorrow!" Kalidas blessed her.

"My master and my lord," said Padmini, "I am your wedded wife".

"I have no wife now," and "I have renounced my home" replied Kalidas. "You may go home and spend your days in peace."

Padmini was much disappointed. All her entreaties to Kalidas to come to her palace were in vain. She went back heart-broken.

Once *Raja* Bhoj of Dharanagri came to the temple with his family, followed by his retinue. He was a great patron of art and learning. He worshipped Mother Kali in the temple and requested Kalidas to sing for him. When Kalidas sang, inspired by the King's devotion to the Mother, his song stirred the inner being of *Raja* Bhoj. The *Raja* requested the poet to accompany him to his palace and spend his days there as his honoured courtier.

Kalidas accepted the offer and accompanied the *Raja* to Dharanagri.

16. An Invitation

During those days, Ceylon was a country at the height of its glory and prosperity. Kumargupta, the prince of Ceylon was himself a learned man and patronised man of art. Shaped by human hands, the capital city of Sri Lanka, was believed to be the replica of Alaka—the abode of the gods. Stately buildings, glittering palaces, broad highways, wide avenues flanked by tall shady trees and parks with multi-coloured fragrant flowers made it a paradise on earth.

Inspired by Kalidas's *Meghdoot*, Prince Kumargupta wrote "Janki Haranam" and presented it to Kalidas. Simultaneously, he extended an invitation to Kalidas to visit Ceylon and stay as his guest.

Kalidas derived much joy by reading Janki Haranam. In this book, Kumargupta had scaled new poetic heights and its sonorous rhymes were on the lips of everyone.

Kalidas wrote a long congratulatory letter to prince Kumargupta and told him he would visit Ceylon after some time. He wanted to see the wonders of Ceylon for which the country was famous. Kumargupta's invitation rekindled his sleeping wander-lust.

Though Kalidas had grown old and the journey was long and arduous, yet he was not discouraged. He decided to discard his rank and status and go alone as an ordinary traveller to Ceylon.

17. The Journey and Reunion

In the days of Kalidas, the means of transportation were primitive. Roads were not well-developed and habitations were few and far between. People usually travelled in groups for the sake of safety.

Against the advice of his friends, Kalidas decided to travel all alone to Ceylon as a common wayfarer.

Ceylon was separated by thousands of miles from Dharanagri and it took several months to travel the distance. Even in his old age, Kalidas was fearless and had full faith in the grace of Mother Kali.

One day he took leave of *Raja Bhoj*, bade farewell to his friends and started on the long journey to Ceylon. He took his writing material with him for he derived intense pleasure in singing and composing songs.

The road to Ceylon led through cultivated fields, thick forests, over hills and across the streams. On the way, he stayed in temples or with villagers who extended him hospitality. No one recognised him. He did not mind the difficulties; on the contrary, bore them cheerfully.

After many months of journey, he reached Kanyakumari. There he stayed in a temple for the night. While he was resting under a tree, in the open yard of the temple, an old woman came there and fell at his feet. Kalidas was taken by surprise.

The woman asked Kalidas whether he recognised her.

Kalidas showed his inability to recognise her. Then the woman disclosed that she was Parvati, the daughter of his village headman and his wife.

On hearing the name of Parvati, Kalidas got a great shock. The dormant love for Parvati once again surged in him and the old memories revived. Out of sheer happiness, he fainted and fell down. Parvati took him to a *vihara* where she nursed him back to health. Kalidas stayed in the *vihara* for some days to rest.

Parvati narrated to Kalidas the untold sufferings and hardships she underwent at the hands of her kidnappers. She gave the details of her escape from the kidnappers in a foreign land and how she returned to India. She said that she used to

read the songs written by Kalidas and also that his sincerity and depth of feelings sustained her during her travails. She came to Kanyakumari and had, since her arrival, been passing her days in the *vihara*. She told Kalidas that he was well known in foreign lands and his songs were recited at public meetings.

18. The Last Words of Kalidas

After many months of his departure from Dharanagri, Kalidas stepped on the soil of Ceylon. He was struck by the grandeur which met his eyes. It was dusk when he landed there. The sound of soft music floated through the air. A stranger in Ceylon, Kalidas started looking for shelter for the night.

At a villa, he met Kamini, a young damsel who enquired where he had come from and who he wished to see.

Kalidas told her that he had come from India to see the land of beauty and grandeur and asked whether the kind lady would give him shelter for the night.

Kalidas was invited to spend the night at the villa.

Inside, the floors were carpeted, paintings adorned the walls, silken tapestries were hung on doors and windows and there was a regal touch about everything.

Kalidas washed, dined and was led into a room to rest and sleep.

In the middle of the night, Kalidas woke up and saw light coming out the girl's room. He thought something was wrong and got up. He knocked at the door and the girl enquired, "Do you want anything?"

Kalidas asked "Why are you up at this time ? Are you all right ? Can I do anything for you?"

The girl said, "O stranger to this land, you come from India where people are honest, trustworthy and observe the *dharmā*. You inspire confidence in me and I will tell you why I am awake at this hour."

Then Kamini said to Kalidas, "I am in love with Kumargupta, the Prince of Ceylon. He returns my love. He is a great poet and has laid a condition for our marriage. He composed half a verse and wants me to complete the rest before our marriage can be solemnised. I have spent many sleepless nights on it but it is beyond me."

"And what are the lines the Prince wrote?" asked Kalidas.

The girl read aloud:

"Was lotus growing on a lotus seen?"

"Nay, only heard, it is never seen."

and handed the piece of paper to Kalidas.

Kalidas took his pen and wrote under it:

"How does it happen, O lovely lass,

Thy lotus face has two lotus eyes?"

and returned the paper to the girl.

Kamini read it again and again and was very delighted. She thanked Kalidas profusely and led him to his room.

When Kamini was alone in her room, she was afraid; what would happen if the secret was let out by the stranger to Kumargupta. An idea struck her. She took out her dagger and went to the room where Kalidas was sleeping soundly and plunged it in his heart.

Kalidas shrieked and groaned, "Kumargupta, Goodbye. Kalidas is unlucky; he could not see you," and then breathed his last.

When Kamini heard the name of Kalidas, she was aghast. She searched his luggage to make sure if the stranger was Kalidas. A copy of Meghdoot and a newly composed poem were found. She cursed herself for her folly and killed herself with the same dagger.

Next morning when Kumargupta came to Kamini's palace, he found both Kamini and Kalidas dead. He went to Kamini's room and read the paper. He also took the new poem composed by Kalidas.

Ceylon was plunged in grief. The body of Kalidas was cremated in a sandal-wood pyre with due rites. When flames lept high, Kumargupta said to the mourners: "My friends, we are unfortunate that Kalidas came to our country only to die. He could not meet me in his life". Then he waved the newly composed poem and continued, "This is the poem he wrote for me. If he could not meet me while alive, then I must go to meet him; saying this, he lept into the burning pyre with the poem in his hand.

19. Kalidas and the Ass

Raja Bhoj and Kalidas liked each other very much and their friendship grew into a close personal relationship. They often engaged themselves in a battle of wits in which the *Raja* was invariably the loser. *Raja* Bhoj often thought of novel schemes to humble Kalidas but the latter was always one up.

Both of them used to visit a particular dancing girl. Once the *Raja* took the dancing girl into confidence and told her that she can win a prize of thousand gold coins if she acted in accordance with his instructions.

When Kalidas visited the dancing girl she admitted him into her sitting room but did not entertain him. She went inside the house and did not come out. Kalidas waited for some time and then went in to find the girl lying on her bed in a depressed mood. Kalidas tried to cheer her up but in vain. Kalidas coaxed and cajoled her and at last the girl told Kalidas that she did not like his long hair and the flowing beard. She asked him to shave them off. To please the girl, Kalidas had his hair and the beard removed then and there. When the girl saw Kalidas without his hair and beard, she smiled. Kalidas suspected some trickery.

When *Raja* Bhoj visited the dancing girl, he was pleased to find Kalidas without beard and hair. He told the dancer that she had done him a great favour and he would never forget it.

The dancing girl begged the *Raja* to grant her a favour in return. She told him that she had not heard an ass bray for a long time and she would be happy if the *Raja* imitated an ass. To please her, the *Raja* brayed like an ass.

When Kalidas came into the court without his hair, *Raja* Bhoj showed feigned surprise and wanted to know the reason why the great poet had shaved off his hair and the beard.

Kalidas replied without any hesitation that the day the *Rajas* brayed like an ass, was celebrated by the poets, by shaving off their hair.

Once again the *Raja* was beaten by Kalidas. The courtiers took this as another exchange of banter and none knew the story.

20. Kalidas and the Ghost

Raja Bhoj built a rest house for the public but whoever spent a night in it was found dead or injured in the morning. Everyone was frightened and none went near it, as it was believed to be haunted by a ghost.

When *Raja* Bhoj learnt about the ghost, he sent two of his ministers to pass a night in the rest house to get at the truth. They were also found dead in the rest house. The *Raja* asked the court priests to propitiate the ghost and make it leave the rest house; but the priests did not succeed in their mission.

Kalidas volunteered to pass a night in the rest house and meet the ghost. At first, the King was reluctant to allow him to do so. When Kalidas insisted, the King gave in.

Around mid-night, an eerie voice called out to Kalidas, "Complete the sentence 'Everyone has two' or I kill you."

Kalidas answered, "Everyone has two types of circumstances, the good and the bad."

Hearing this, the ghost quietly slipped away.

After some time, the ghost came again. Kalidas said to the ghost, "It is now my turn to ask you a question. Promise, if you do not answer correctly, you will leave the house." The ghost agreed to it.

Kalidas said, there is a round stick which is uniform on all its sides. How will you find its upper and the lower ends?"

The ghost could not answer the question and asked Kalidas to explain it. Kalidas told him that the stick should be put into water; its lower end would sink and the upper end would float on the water.

The ghost then left the place and the Raja was very pleased at the success of Kalidas in exorcising the ghost.

21. The Cryptic Message

Gobind and Vishnu went to Varanasi for their education. They came from Dharanagri, the capital of *Raja* Bhoj. Gobind worked hard but Vishnu wasted his time in Varanasi. After twelve years, they completed their education and started for home. On their way, they halted at a river bank for a meal. They wanted to light a fire to cook their food. Gobind asked Vishnu to collect some wood and he would light the fire.

Vishnu became jealous when he saw Gobind lighting fire by the *mantra-shakti*. There and then he resolved to kill Gobind so that no one might know how learned his friend was.

After taking their food, the two friends went to sleep. While Gobind was sleeping soundly, Vishnu got up and thrust his dagger into Gobind's chest. Gobind woke up shrieking in pain.

When Vishnu was about to stab him once again, Gobind stopped his friend saying, "Listen, Vishnu, I am dying; When

you go home and my father asks about me, tell him I have not yet finished my studies and would return home when my education is completed."

Taking out a piece of paper from his pocket, Gobind wrote four letters on it. He handed over the paper to Vishnu and said, "Please give this paper to my father."

Vishnu took that piece of paper and put it into his pocket. When Gobind was dead, he hurriedly left the place and resumed his journey.

At Dharanagri, Vishnu was warmly welcomed home. Gobind's father came to him and asked about his son.

Vishnu told him that Gobind would take some more years to complete his education and handed over the letter to him.

Gobind's father read the letter a number of times but could make no sense out of it. Then he asked Vishnu to tell him what was written in the letter.

Vishnu explained to Gobind's father that Gobind was all right but was weak in studies and that he would not return without completing his studies.

Gobind's father was not satisfied with the explanation. He went to the court of *Raja Bhoj* and said to the *Raja*, "My Lord, my son is studying in Varanasi. He sent me this letter. Nobody is able to understand it. There are many learned men in your court. Be pleased to have my letter read and interpreted."

Raja Bhoj took the piece of paper and saw the four letters. He could make nothing of it. Then he handed the paper over to his minister but he too could not understand the message in the script.

A messenger was sent to fetch Kalidas. *Raja Bhoj* had much faith in him and was sure that he would be able to decode the message.

When Kalidas saw the letter, his face was clouded with sadness. He said to the old man, "The letter contains a very bad news for you." Then he asked *Raja* Bhoj to send his soldiers to arrest the person who had brought that letter.

When Vishnu was brought before the *Raja*, Kalidas said, "It is written on this paper that Vishnu killed Gobind with a dagger when the latter was sleeping in the forest."

The old man wept bitterly on hearing it. Everyone present in the court marvelled at the matchless learning of Kalidas.

22. Kalidas as a Prisoner

Kalidas was a select courtier at the court of *Raja* Bhoj. He was highly respected by the *Raja* who thought himself lucky to have such a wise, learned and renowned poet and musician in his court. None could equal Kalidas in wit and wisdom. When knotty problems arose, all looked up to him to solve them.

Once a great assembly of men of art and learning was held under the auspices of *Raja* Bhoj. Chandravati, the younger sister of *Raja* Bhadraraj, also attended the function. She was captivated by the music of Kalidas and resolved to take him to her brother's court.

In spite of many a requests by *Raja* Bhadraraj, *Raja* Bhoj did not allow Kalidas to go to his court. Bhadraraj therefore decided to wage a war on *Raja* Bhoj and bring Kalidas to his court by force. One after another, twenty attacks were made on Dharanagri, the capital of *Raja* Bhoj's Kingdom but each attack was repulsed with heavy losses to *Raja* Bhadraraj who felt ashamed and humiliated at his defeat.

When *Raja* Bhadraraj could not succeed in bringing Kalidas to his court by force, he stooped to trickery. He sent some of his men to Dharanagri to learn poetry and music from Kalidas. Having no clue to their bad intentions, Kalidas trusted them and mixed freely with them. One day, they kidnapped him and brought him to the court of *Raja* Bhadraraj.

There was merry making in the capital of *Raja Bhadraraj*. People illuminated their homes, feasted and danced with joy because Kalidas had come to them.

A day was fixed when Kalidas would appear in public. On the appointed day, Kalidas was brought to Bhadraraj's court with due dignity. He was asked to sing but he refused. Chandravati personally came to the court and entreated Kalidas to sing but he would not.

Feeling insulted *Raja Bhadraraj* arrested Kalidas and threw him in jail. The king's men got angry and booed and hooted at Kalidas.

When *Raja Bhoj* came to know of the incident, he was very angry. *Raja Bhoj* ordered his soldiers to march on the capital of *Raja Bhadraraj* and free Kalidas.

A fierce battle was fought for several days. At last *Raja Bhadraraj*'s army was completely routed. There was rebellion among his soldiers as they were sick of the insensate slaughter.

No one stood by *Raja Bhadraraj*. His ministers were against him. Chandravati was secretly in love with Kalidas and turned his helper. In the battle, many of his fine soldiers had died. Defeated and disappointed, *Raja Bhadraraj* made a treaty with *Raja Bhoj* and set Kalidas free.

23. The Test of Greatness

Among the many learned men in the court of *Raja Bhoj*, Kalidas enjoyed a unique position. He was held in high esteem by the *Raja* who placed complete confidence in him. This was a cause of heart-burning among other courtiers who thought Kalidas received undeserved honour and praise from the *Raja*.

Once some courtiers approached the *Raja* and told him that Bhavbhooti, another poet, composed songs far more better than Kalidas.

Raja Bhoj enquired how he could make himself sure of that.

They suggested that both of them should write their songs on separate papers and have the papers weighed. The poet whose song weighed more should be declared the greater of the two.

The *Raja* consented and a day was fixed for weighing the papers on which, songs by Kalidas and Bhavbhooti were written.

On the appointed day, the *Raja* in the company of Kalidas, Bhavbhooti and his courtiers went to the temple of Mother Kali. In the temple, before the goddess, the songs written by Kalidas and Bhavbhooti were put in the two pans of a weighing scale.

The pan with the song composed by Kalidas went down. It was heavier than the other.

When Bhavbhooti saw this, he fervently prayed to Mother Kali to save him from the difficult situation. To save the face of her devotee, the goddess put her foot on the pan containing the songs of Bhavbhooti. Slowly that pan came down while the other went up.

No one could understand the miracle but Kalidas quickly understood what was happening.

He said aloud, "O Goddess, why take the unnecessary trouble. I concede Bhavbhooti's pan is heavier."

Bhavbhooti was much ashamed. Silence descended on the temple, as Bhavbhooti fell at the feet of Kalidas and acknowledged him as the Great Poet.

24. The Fish and the Book

Once some *Brahmins*, out of jealousy, reported against Kalidas to *Raja* Bhoj. They said that Kalidas was a fish-eater. He used to go to the river for catching fish on the pretention of going there for a bath.

The *Raja* expressed his disbelief. The *Brahmins* agreed to prove their charge.

They hid themselves near the river bank and waited for an opportunity to catch Kalidas red-handed.

Somehow, Kalidas came to know of this. One day he came to the river and caught a fish. He hid the fish in his *dhoti* and tied it round his chest.

The *Brahmins* who were in hiding by the river bank, caught Kalidas and brought him to the court. They narrated the event in the court.

Raja Bhoj said to Kalidas, "O poet of great fame, what bulges on your chest?"

"O *Raja*, the protector of the learned, I keep my sacred book here," replied Kalidas.

"And what is this tail-like thing?" said the *Raja*.

"The letters of the book," explained Kalidas. "But why does it shake?"

"The book vibrates by the power of its *shlokas*."

The *Brahmins* became impatient and requested the *Raja* to order Kalidas to uncover his "book".

When Kalidas uncovered it, everyone was taken by surprise to see a book in the *dhoti* and not a fish, as expected. The *Brahmins* who had accused Kalidas, were put to shame and asked for his forgiveness.

25. She

Once, *Raja Bhoj* went on a round of his capital in disguise. In front of a *Brahmin's* house, he saw a strange scene. The *Brahmin* was feeding crows after his morning prayers. His wife, standing beside him, was saying again and again, "The crows frighten me. It is enough; stop it; stop it."

The *Brahmin* continued the feeding and replied, "You are a silly girl. No one is frightened of crows. These birds are harmless."

"I am not so brave. I am really frightened. That is why I remain in the house all the time," replied his wife.

The *Raja* listened to the dialogue and went his way. When night fell, the *Raja* happened to pass again the *Brahmin's* house. He saw the *Brahmin's* wife coming out of her house and taking to the road fearlessly, though dogs were barking and the jackals were howling. The *Raja* followed her. The woman went to the Narmada river and swam across it to go to a young *sadhu's* ashram. After some time she returned to her house, while the *Brahmin* was asleep all the time.

Next morning in his court, the *Raja* asked his courtiers to compose a second line to complete the verse; "In the morning, she is scared of crows....."

The courtiers were baffled by the King's demand. However to the great delight and astonishment of the *Raja*, Kalidas said aloud:

"In the morning, she is scared of crows,

In the night, she crosses the Narmada."

26. Search for Kalidas

Raja Bhoj and Kalidas were very close to each other. Kalidas often took too much liberty with the King. Once *Raja Bhoj* was so angry with Kalidas that he banished him from his kingdom.

Kalidas immediately left his house and went into the forest.

After some time, *Raja Bhoj* missed Kalidas. Without Kalidas, his court was not as lively as it used to be. Learned men from the courts of other kings came for friendly debates.

They defeated the courtiers of *Raja Bhoj*. Such humiliating defeats had never been suffered in the past. *Raja Bhoj* ordered a search for Kalidas and wanted him to be brought to Dharanagri with due honour.

Every nook and corner of the country was searched but Kalidas was to be found nowhere. This made the *Raja* all the more miserable and he decided to undertake the search himself. He disguised himself as a *sadhu* and left his palace in search of Kalidas.

After a long time, he found Kalidas in a temple. Kalidas did not recognise *Raja Bhoj* as the latter was in disguise.

When Kalidas asked the *sadhu* where he came from, the *Raja* said, "From Dharanagri."

"How is *Raja Bhoj*?" asked Kalidas.

"The *Raja* died in sorrow after banishing Kalidas," lied the *sadhu*.

Kalidas was much grieved to learn it. Spontaneously a Sanskrit shloka escaped from his mouth:

"*Raja Bhoj* is dead;

Dharanagri has lost its defender and its glory;

And the learned have lost their celebrated patron."

No sooner did Kalidas say the shloka, than the *sadhu* fell down dead.

Then Kalidas knew that the *sadhu* was, in fact, *Raja Bhoj* in disguise. Immediately, Kalidas recited another shloka which meant: *Raja Bhoj* is alive and strong; Dharanagri is at its glory as the wise and the learned are honoured there."

As soon as Kalidas recited the shloka, *Raja Bhoj* came to life again. Very delighted, the seeker and the sought returned to Dharanagri.

ABHIGYANSHAKUNTALAM

Once King Dushyanta went deep into the forest for a hunt. He spotted a deer and followed it on his chariot.

Soon he saw two young hermits, who stopped him and said, "This is a pet of our hermitage; please don't shoot your arrow at it."

The young hermits told the king that he was near the hermitage of Kanva, whose daughter, in his absence, was looking after the *Ashram*.

Dushyanta got off his chariot and walked towards the hermitage. The king saw Shakuntala and her two playmates, Anusuya and Priyamvada from behind a tree. He was struck by the beauty, grace and loveliness of Shakuntala.

That very moment as if from nowhere, a bumble-bee came and began to circle-around Shakuntala's head. She became frightened and screamed.

"Call *Raja* Dushyanta to save you from the insect," joked Priyamvada.

The king heard the joke and felt it was the right moment to approach them.

Seeing the king suddenly appear before them, they stopped talking, Anusuya then spoke to the king, "My Lord, a bumble-bee is troubling our friend here. She needs your help."

Shakuntala felt embarrassed and blushed. As she looked at the king, she was attracted towards him. It was love at first sight.

Anusuya told the king that Shakuntala was the daughter of Rishi Vishwamitra; that her mother's name was Menaka; and that she had been brought up by Rishi Kanva, who was in search of a suitable partner for her.

Shakuntala's embarrassment increased and she said to Anusuya, "See, I will just go in and tell mother Gautami, all about it."

"But first you finish watering the two plants before you go in," replied Priyamvada.

Shakuntala's disconcertment moved the king's heart and he reproached Priyamvada saying, "Look! She is tired; in her place, I will do her work." The king then took off his ring and gave it to her, who put it on Shakuntala's finger.

The king was encamped near the hermitage and the hunt went on for many days. The disciples of hermit Kanva complained to the king that their hermitage was continually being raided by demons and that the king should protect them.

At that time a messenger sent by the king's mother arrived at the camp. He told the king that his mother was observing a fast and needed his presence there. However, the king decided to stay on, but sent his close friend, Madhava, back to the capital. When the demons saw the king staying at the hermitage, they stopped molesting the inmates.

One day, Dushyanta was resting under a creeper, when he heard Shakuntala talking with Priyamvada and Anusuya; "When I saw the king of Tapovan, I lost my heart to him; Tell me a way that may unite me with my lover," said Shakuntala.

The king was very happy to hear those words.

Priyamvada asked Shakuntala to write a letter to the king. Shakuntala agreed and wrote a lovely letter with her nail. She then read it out to Priyamvada.

When the king heard what Shakuntala had written, he could not control himself. He came out of the foliage and walked

towards the three girls, who were greatly embarrassed by his sudden appearance. Anusuya and Priyamvada wanted to leave the place. A baby deer came there and provided a good excuse to Priyamvada for leaving the place. She said to Anusuya, "It seems the baby deer has lost its mother. Come, Anusuya, let us take it in."

Saying this, both of them left the place with the deer.

The king lost no time in proposing to Shakuntala. Shakuntala accepted the king's proposal which made him very happy. He stayed on at the hermitage till he was called back to Hastinapur on some important work.

One day, Durvasa *rishi* came to the hermitage and called out Shakuntala. She did not hear him as she was engrossed in her thoughts about the king. Durvasa lost his temper and cursed her saying, "The one of whom you think so much, shall forget you."

Priyamvada and Anusuya who were plucking flowers, heard the curse. They begged the hermit to forgive Shakuntala. Durvasa said to them, "My word shall have its effect, but the ring Dushyanta gave her will establish her identity." Saying this, Durvasa went away but the two girls did not disclose anything to Shakuntala.

When *Rishi* Kanva returned to his hermitage, he heard a voice from the sky announcing Shakuntala's marriage with Dushyanta. He began to make arrangements for sending Shakuntala to the King.

On the day of Shakuntala's departure, Kanva with tearful eyes told her, "Dear daughter, when you go to your husband's house, respect the Gurus; Be friendly with the other queens; Don't reciprocate your husband's anger; Don't be proud of your position; Whosoever has these qualities, is a good woman."

Crying and sobbing, Shakuntala fell at her foster father's feet and sought his blessings.

Priyamvada said to Shakuntala, "The kings are in the habit of forgetting their word. If Dushyanta takes time to recognise you, show the ring."

Shakuntala's departure cast a gloom all over the forest. Deers stopped eating, peacocks stopped dancing and creepers dropped as if struck by the pang of separation.

Shakuntala arrived at the court of king Dushyanta in the company of two hermits and two other women from the hermitage who explained their mission. The king was very surprised to hear them and exclaimed, "When did I marry her? I know the ways of women; don't try to trap me."

Shakuntala was grief-stricken on hearing the king. She pleaded with him and reminded him of his stay in the hermitage, but in vain. She was in a fix, as she could neither stay there as was customary for a married girl, nor return to the hermitage.

The *Rajguru* made a suggestion to the king to allow him to put her up and the king could accept her if a son was born to her. But at that time a fairy descended from the sky and carried Shakuntala away to the hermitage of Marichi.

One day a fisherman brought a ring which bore the king's name. When questioned where he had found it, the fisherman replied that he found it inside the stomach of a fish. When the king looked at the ring, old memories were revived within him and he became very sad because he had disgraced Shakuntala so heartlessly. Since that day, the king lived in great sorrow and began to pine away. Salumati, the nymph, saw this and carried the good news to Shakuntala.

At that time a war broke out between the gods and the demons. Matali, Indra's charioteer, came to Dushyanta for taking him to the heaven for fighting the demons. Leaving the affairs of his kingdom in the hands of Pishnu, his minister, the king left for the heaven on the divine chariot.

A fierce war was fought and the demons were vanquished. When the war was over, Dushyanta returned to the earth. On the way, he stopped at the Hemkunth peak to pay his homage to hermit Marichi. At the hermitage, he saw a child playing with a tiger cub. A woman hermit was coaxing the child to give up the play. By chance, the child's bracelet broke and fell down. It was a charm given to the child as a gift by hermit Kashyap. If anyone other than the child's parents touched it, it turned into a snake to bite. When the king picked up the bracelet, it did not turn into a snake.

The woman hermit was sure that it was King Dushyanta, the father of the child. The king also learnt from her that the child was his son. He told the story of the ring to Shakuntala. They rejoiced at their reunion.

Kashyap told the king that the boy would be called Bharat and would be a benevolent king under whom the people would be happy and prosperous.

After some days, Dushyanta took leave of Kashyap and returned to his kingdom with Shakuntala and Bharat.

VIKRAM URVASIYAM

Once, Urvasi and her friend, Chitrlekha (two fairies in the court of Indra, the god of rain) were returning home from Kubera's abode. Keshi, the demon, saw them and promptly kidnapped the two. While, Urvasi fainted, Chitrlekha shouted aloud, "Come, oh! friend of the gods, come and help us."

Pururuva, the king of Bharat, was passing that way. Hearing the shouts of Chitrlekha, he rescued Urvasi and her friend from the demon.

When Urvasi regained consciousness, she thought that Indra had rescued her. Chitrlekha told her that King Pururuva did so. Urvasi was very happy to know it. She looked at the king with gratitude and tenderness. As the king looked at Urvasi, he instantly fell in love with her.

Upon Indra's bidding, Chitravat hastily arrived there to rescue Urvasi from the Demon. When he learnt that King Pururuva had already helped Urvasi, he was very happy. They were old friends.

Chitravat invited the king to come to the court of Indra as he had done a great favour to the god, but the king refused and took leave of his friend. He was in a hurry to go to his kingdom. Urvasi was too shy to bid farewell to him. The king was so much attracted by Urvasi that, while on his way to the capital, he kept looking back again and again.

When Pururuva returned to his capital, he became restless. His queen observed the pitiful condition of the king and learnt the cause from Manavak, the king's friend. She tried her best to comfort the king but without any success.

It was spring time. The fragrance of colourful flowers and the flavour of the ripened fruits could not enthuse the king. The divine beauty of Urvasi had cast a spell on him. He was forlorn and miserable and lost all interest in the affairs of his kingdom.

One day when Manavak was sitting by the king consoling him, Urvasi and Chitrlekha happened to pass that place. Both of them were invisible to human eyes. Urvasi heard Manavak suggesting to the king to meet Urvasi in his dreams or paint her picture. The king replied that he was too troubled to sleep at night and was unable to meet Urvasi in his dreams; Also that he could not paint because his vision was dimmed by the tears flowing continuously. Urvasi was very pleased to hear this and was convinced of the king's true love for her. Still invisible, she wrote a letter and threw it in front of the king.

The king picked up the letter. Overjoyed but fearing that he might damage the letter, the king handed it over to Manavak. Soon after that, Urvasi appeared before the king.

Before they could stay together for long, Indra recalled Urvasi for putting up a play in his court. Thus the lovers were separated. Unfortunately, Manavak lost Urvasi's letter and it was found by the queen who passed that way. In no time, the queen learnt that Urvasi was the cause of the king's unhappiness. She came to him, handed over the letter and walked away in a huff, paying no attention to him or to his excuses.

Meanwhile, a scene depicting Lakshmi's marriage was being played in the court of Indra. Urvasi acted as Lakshmi. When asked, whom she had chosen as her spouse, Urvasi replied "Pururuva," forgetting to say "Vishnu". Bharat Muni, the divine director who was annoyed at this, cursed Urvasi and expelled her from the heaven. When the play was over, Urvasi stood there ashamed with downcast eyes. Indra told her that she could remain with the king till he saw his son's face and then she would have to return to his court.

On the earth, the queen observed a fast to purify herself. When the fast was over, she called on the king but he vowed abiding love for Urvasi. She then left the king and went away. Urvasi, who had arrived on the earth some time earlier, thought the queen had left the king so that she might be his rightful wife.

Urvasi's friend Chitralekha made the king promise that he would take good care of Urvasi and left for *Indra-Lok*. The king took Urvasi to his palace. After some days, the king entrusted his kingdom to his ministers and left for the mountain "Kailash" where both made their abode. They spent their time wandering in the mountains.

One day Urvasi saw King Pururuva staring at another damsel. Thereupon, she left the king in anger and strayed into the forest where Indra's devotees were meditating. It was an enchanted forest where any woman who strayed in, turned into a vine. Urvasi was also instantly transformed into a vine.

The king made frantic efforts to search for Urvasi but all in vain. He was depressed and distressed at her disappearance.

While wandering about in search of Urvasi, one day, the king found a precious stone. A voice from the sky told him that the stone had the power of uniting the separated lovers. Soon his eyes fell on a flowerless vine which resembled Urvasi. He closed his eyes and touched it with the stone. Instantly Urvasi appeared before him. Seeing her, the king fainted. With tears in her eyes, Urvasi begged his forgiveness and reminded him that he had neglected his kingdom for long and his subjects might be blaming her for the same.

Both of them returned to the capital and were welcomed home amidst great rejoicings. The king himself looked after the kingdom once again, but his only grief was that he had no son.

One day, a servant was carrying, one of the queen's crown jewels in his hand. Mistaking it for a piece of meat, a hawk swooped down on it and took it away. By the time the king

arrived with his bow and arrow, the bird had disappeared. The king ordered a search for the gem. Shortly a message came that the king's anger, assuming the form of an arrow, had killed the hawk. Inscribed on the arrow was a message that the arrow belonged to the son of Urvasi and Pururuva. Manavak was very happy to know it but the king was unable to understand the riddle.

At that time, a woman with a young child arrived from Chyavan Rishi's ashram. When the king saw the child, his heart leapt with joy. The woman told the king that some time back, Urvasi had left that child with the Rishi; that Chyavan Rishi had brought up that child and taught him the use of the bow and arrow but that day the child had disobeyed the Rishi's advice, killing a hawk; and that she had brought back the child to Urvasi. Saying this, she went back.

The king was very happy to see his son, but Urvasi was very sad and started sobbing. When the king asked her the cause of her grief, she related Indra's curse and disclosed that she had left the child with the Rishi so that the king might not see him.

The king was very unhappy on learning that Urvasi had to return to Indra's court. He expressed a desire to renounce the world and spend his life as a recluse. At that time the sage Narad descended from the sky and forbade the king from doing so. He informed the king that it was Indra's desire that Pururuva should not give up his kingdom as Urvasi had been allowed to stay with him. Narad also told the king that war between the gods and the demons would soon start and the king should help the gods.

Thereafter, King Pururuva, Urvasi and the little prince lived happily for a long time and knew no worldly sorrow.

MALAVIKAGNIMITRA

The last Maurya king was not a powerful ruler. Pushyamitra, the Army Chief, killed him and himself became the king. Agnimitra was the son of Pushyamitra and ruled Vidisha. He had two wives-Dharani and Iravati. The former was the senior queen. Agnimitra handed over the administration of Antpalgarh to Virsen, a distant cousin of Dharani. Virsen sent a beautiful slave girl, Malavika, to Dharani, to be given lessons in dancing and music to make her an accomplished court dancer.

Once, Agnimitra paid a visit to the Art Gallery. In a picture, he saw a charming girl amidst a group of maid servants. He enquired her name but Dharani did not answer. However, their daughter, Vasulakshmi, disclosed that she was Malavika. Dharani was displeased at this disclosure and suspected faithlessness on the part of the king. Since that day a strict watch was kept on Malavika.

Acharya Gunadas used to teach dancing and music to Malavika. The gentle nature, captivating beauty and sharp intellect of Malavika made the Acharya feel that she was not a slave girl but a descendant of some noble family. In fact, Malavika belonged to a royal family but nobody knew it..

Yagyasen and Madhavsena, who were cousins, ruled Vidarbha. They fought between themselves to subdue each other and grab the entire Vidarbha. Malavika was the sister of Madhavsena who wanted to get her married to Agnimitra and thus add to his power by this alliance. When he was on his way to Agnimitra's kingdom, he was attacked by Yagyasen and taken prisoner. In the confusion that followed, Malavika was lost.

Agnimitra wrote to Yagyasen to free Madhavsena but the latter refused. This annoyed Agnimitra and he ordered Virsen to attack Vidarbha and free Madhavsena.

The king wanted to meet Malavika. He asked his friend Gautam who led a gay life, to help him in this affair. Gautam was about to make some suggestion when the two Acharyas, Gunadas and Hardatt, brought their suit before the king. They wanted to know who was the senior *Acharya*. The king told them that his queen Dharani, and her friend, Kaushiki, would decide their dispute.

The queen heard their dispute. Kaushiki was also present there. She asked the two Acharyas to show her what they had taught their students. Both of them agreed and returned to the studio for making preparations.

The programme began in the studio in the presence of the king, his queen and the royal retinue. *Acharya* Gunadas, who was the elder of the two, was asked to start his programme first.

Malavika came on the stage in the company of Gunadas. The king was stunned by her beauty. Her graceful dance cast a spell over the audience. Everyone present there praised her in full measure. Just then the time for lunch was announced and Hardatt was asked to put up his student's performance next day.

Rumours about the love affairs of the king and Malavika spread. The king was in love with Malavika but could not show his feelings towards her for the fear of his queen.

It was the Vasant Festival. Gautam asked the king to visit the *Pramodvan* as Iravati, the junior queen, had expressed a desire to enjoy a ride in the swing with him.

The young and gay maidens in their bright and colourful attires thronged the *Pramodvan*. They kicked the ashoka tree with their painted toes and the buds opened into blossoms. There was gaiety, fun and laughter. Only one tree had not blossomed. Iravati used to visit the fair every day. Unluckily,

one day she fell down from the swing and sprained her foot. She asked Malavika to nurse it. Malavika came to the *Pramodvan* with her friend, another maid. She had her toes painted. The king who had also arrived there, was looking at her from a distance. Malavika kicked the ashoka tree with her left foot. Suddenly, Gautam appeared there and told her that she had done a wrong thing by kicking the king's tree. As Malavika blushed, the king also came there. Malavika and her friend fell at the king's feet and begged his forgiveness. The king lifted Malavika up from the ground and professed his love for her.

Iravati saw what was going on. She was enraged at the behaviour of the king and scolded him. Malavika and her friend disappeared from the scene and left the king alone.

When the senior queen, Dharani, came to know of this, she threw Malavika and her friend into a dungeon and told the guard not to release them until her snake-stone ring was shown to him.

The king was distressed when he came to know about the imprisonment of Malavika. He asked Gautam to plan her release. He himself went to see the queen. While he was talking to her, Gautam appeared there crying and sobbing. He told the king that he was bitten by a snake in the *Pramodvan*, where he had gone to pick flowers for the queen. His toe was tied with his holy thread and there were marks of snake-bite on it.

The queen became nervous on seeing the dying *brahmin*. The king comforted her and sent Gautam to the physician, Bharavsiddhi, for treatment. After a while, a messenger came there and told the king that the physician needed snake-stone to draw out the poison from the body of Gautam. The queen removed her ring and gave it to the messenger.

Soon the news came that Gautam had been cured of the snakebite. While the king was on his way back, he met Gautam who told him that Malavika and her friend had been freed from the dungeon and were waiting in *Samudra-grih*. The king went

there in the company of Gautam. There he met Malavika. Gautam and Malavika's friend made some excuse and left the place. The king and Malavika were left alone.

Irayati, the junior queen, also came to the *Pramodvan* to see Gautam. At the door of *Samudra-grih* she found Gautam fast asleep and talking about Malavika in his sleep. The queen was annoyed and threw a piece of wood at him. Gautam woke up frightened, thinking he had been bitten by a snake. When the king heard him shrieking, he came there to help him. By that time, Gautam had composed himself and told the king that it was a bad dream which he had seen as a result of his pretension of being bitten by a snake. He confessed that he had not been bitten by a snake but he staged the scene to get the queen's ring to free Malavika.

Queen Iravati, who was out of sight, heard the story. She was in a fit of rage. Malavika was also frightened like a pigeon caught by a cat. The king was in a fix. He tried to pacify the queen but did not succeed. The queen bitterly scolded Gautam as she thought that he was the master-mind behind this. The king quietly left the place. At that time the gardener's wife came there to report that the garden was in full bloom. Malavika thought that it was a good opportunity to slip away.

The king came to his palace and received the happy news of the conquest of Vidarbha by Virsen, Queen Dharani's cousin. Iravati sent a message to the king to visit the *Pramodvan* and enjoy the colourful scene of blooming flowers with her.

In the meanwhile, Kaushiki had dressed and adorned Malavika like a bride. The king came to the *Pramodvan* with Gautam and was welcomed by the queen. The king's heart beat wildly when he saw Malavika. At that time, two slave girls, captured by Virsen, were presented to the king. When the slave girls saw Malavika, they offered obeisance to her. When the king enquired the reason for offering obeisance to Malavika, he was told that she was the younger sister of Madhavsena who was escorting her to Vidisha. On the way, he was attacked and

taken prisoner and Malavika was lost in the confusion of the battle.

The next sequel was told by Kaushiki who said to the king that when Madhavsena was arrested, my brother, Sumiti, took Malavika away from the battle-ground to a safe place. I and my brother were escorting her to you, when we were attacked by a gang of dacoits. The dacoits killed my brother. I fainted. When I recovered, Malavika was not there. I did not know what had happened to her. Later on, Virsen rescued Malavika from the dacoits and sent her to Dharani, the senior queen."

The king and the queen expressed their regrets for not treating Malavika in a manner befitting her status. When the king asked Kaushiki to explain why she remained quiet for a year, she said, "A holy man had predicted that Malavika would serve as a slave girl for a year. That is why I kept quiet. Now one year is over and I have told you everything".

Then the king and Malavika were married with royal splendour. There was much rejoicing in the kingdom.

RAGHUVANSH

This is a chronicle of the Raghuvansh, the dynasty founded by King Raghu. There are thirteen cantos in this book, of which the first eight relate to the pre-Ramayan period.

Vaivaswat was the first king of the Sun Race (*Surya Vansh*). One of his later descendants was the mighty king Dilip of Ayodhya. He had no son. This made him unhappy though he was the richest and most powerful king of his times.

One day he entrusted the affairs of his kingdom to his ministers and with his queen, Sudakshina, went to see *Guru Vashishtha*. He asked Vashishtha to tell him the cause of his being childless. *Guru Vashishtha* told the king that "Once while you were returning from the heaven, you did not pay proper respects to Kamadhenu. It is the effect of Kamadhenu's curse that you are childless. Kamadhenu has since gone to the lower regions but her progeny, Nandini, is here with me. Both of you should serve Nandini with a pure heart. If she is pleased with your devotion, your wish is sure to be fulfilled".

King Dilip and his queen undertook to abide by the instructions of *Guru Vashishtha* and stayed on in his ashram.

The queen worshipped Nandini with great devotion. The king took her to the forest for grazing. Wherever she wandered, he followed her like her shadow. He fed her with green, juicy grass; fanned away flies and mosquitoes and brushed her body with his loving hands. Not for a moment did he leave her. When Nandini stopped anywhere, the king also stopped there to wait on her. The king forgot everything and devoted himself, heart and soul to her service. He ate when Nandini had eaten and even drank water after she had drunk it.

In this way, twentyone days passed by. On the twenty second day while grazing grass, Nandini entered a cave in the Himalayas. A lion caught her. When the king saw it, he brought his bow into position and stretched his arm to take out an arrow from the quiver. No sooner did his fingers touch an arrow, than they were stuck fast to it. He could not free his hand to shoot the arrow.

When the lion saw the king helpless, he spoke in a human voice, "O King, I am Kumbhodar, the servant of Lord Shiva and the protector of this forest. Don't try to kill me. I am lucky to catch this cow today. Go your way and don't try to save her."

The king entreated the lion to spare the life of Nandini and eat him instead but the lion would not agree. At last the king lay down before the lion and refused to budge.

Suddenly there was a shower of flowers from the sky. The king heard Nandini speaking sweetly, "Arise, O my devotee, I am pleased with you. Ask a boon that it may be granted to you."

The king asked that he be blessed with a son. Nandini said, "Take my milk in an earthen cup and both of you drink it. Your wish shall be fulfilled."

In the evening, the king and the cow returned to the *ashram*. The king narrated the events of the day to the queen. He milked the cow. After feeding her calf, both of them drank it out of an earthen pot.

They took leave of *Guru Vashishtha* and returned to Ayodhya.

In course of time, a lovely son was born to the queen. The news spread like wildfire and people were mad with joy. The birth of the boy took place under the most auspicious influence of the stars and he was destined to become a mighty emperor. He was named Raghu. As a child, Raghu was a prodigy. Within a short time, he acquired the knowledge, necessary for a prince. When he grew up, he married a beautiful princess.

King Dilip had already performed ninety nine *Ashwamedh yagyas*. The preparations for the hundredth *yagya* were being made. The responsibility of protecting the sacred horse was entrusted to Raghu.

Indra was afraid that he might be dethroned by King Dilip, as he was accumulating the merits of one hundred *Ashwamedh yagyas*. To protect his position, he stole the sacred horse. In the absence of the horse, the 100th *yagya* could not be completed. Raghu came to know about the theft through Nandini. A fierce battle was fought between Indra and Raghu. Though Indra highly praised Raghu's valour, yet he refused to return the horse. Nevertheless the merit of one hundred *Ashwamedh yagyas* was granted to King Dilip.

When the *yagya* was completed, King Dilip entrusted the kingdom to Raghu. The Raghu dynasty was named after him.

Raghu looked after his kingdom properly and efficiently. People were happy and prosperous under his rule.

When winter came, the king made a grand plan of conquest. After conquering Bang, Kalinga, Mahodara and others he reached Malayachal. He subdued Pandavraj in the south. In the west, he crossed the Durbar and the Sahya mountains and swept over all the land up to the coast of Sind. The Himalayan kingdoms of Kabul and Kamboj were also run over. In the east, he marched up to Pragjyotish, now-a-days called Assam. After these conquests, he returned to Ayodhya and performed Vishwajeet *Yagya*. After the completion of the *yagya*, he gifted away his entire wealth in charity. Once Kautsa, the disciple of Rishi Vartaatu, visited the king to collect fourteen crore gold coins as *Guru-dakshina*. King Raghu had already gifted away all his wealth and had kept only earthen pots for himself. When Kautsa saw the circumstances of the king, he was reluctant to demand anything. The king, however, gave his word that the *Guru-dakshina* would be offered to the *rishi*.

The king made up his mind to attack and plunder Kubera, the god of wealth. At that time, the treasurer came to the king

and reported that in the night there had been a rain of gold in the treasury and it was now full of gold. The king was delighted to hear it and offered the Guru-dakshina to Kautsa.

By the grace of the *rishi*, the king was blessed with a son who, like his father, was an embodiment of perfection and virtue. He was called Aj.

When Aj grew up, Raja Bhoj of Vidarbha invited him to his sister Indumati's *swayamvar*. Aj departed for Vidarbha with royal paraphernalia. On the way he killed a wild elephant. This elephant was Priyamvad, son of the king of the Gandharvas, who was transformed into a wild elephant as a result of *Rishi* Matung's curse. Priyamvad was much pleased with Aj on being released from the animal form. In gratitude, he presented a weapon called *Sammohan* to Aj.

At Vidarbha, Aj was given a warm and joyous reception by Raja Bhoj. Indumati's *swayamvar* was a gala affair where princes from far and near kingdoms were present. Many *rishis* and *munis* graced the occasion. Indumati, with a garland in her hand, slowly made a round. Whenever she hesitated before a prince, he was cheered up, but as she passed on, his heart sank in gloom. Ultimately she came before Aj and put the garland round his neck. Her selection was applauded by everyone.

Aj's marriage with Indumati was celebrated with great pomp and show. After the ceremonies were over, the royal couple departed for Ayodhya. On the way, the rejected suitors of Indumati attacked Aj in full strength. Aj used *Sammohan* which was given to him by Priyamvad and defeated them. They reached Ayodhya without any harm.

After some time, King Raghu expressed his desire to entrust the kingdom to Aj and retire to the forest to lead the life of an ascetic. Aj did not let his father to do so. However, Raghu entrusted the kingdom to Aj and started living as a common man at the outskirts of the capital. In course of time, a son was born to Aj and Indumati. He was named Dashrath. Once Aj and his queen were strolling in a garden. As if from nowhere, a

garland fell on Indumati. It was a garland from Narad's Veena. As soon as Indumati saw it, she left for her heavenly abode.

The unexpected death of Indumati caused much anguish to the king. He wept so bitterly that all women of the city were moved and joined him in his lamentation. It was a heart-rending scene. *Rishi* Vashishtha saw the scene through his *divyadrishti* and sent a message to the king that Indumati was a fairy from the heaven; that it was on account of a curse by some *rishi* that she came to the earth as a woman and spent her days as his queen; and that it was ordained that she would go back to the heaven on seeing heavenly flowers.

After the passing away of Indumati, Aj ruled his kingdom for eight more years and then entrusted it to his son Dashrath.

Eight kantos of the book cover the above story. The story of the Ramayan is narrated in the 9th part. The main events of the Ramayan are; performance of *Putreshti-yagya* by King Dashrath; the birth of Rama and his three brothers; Killing of Tarka, *Sitaswayamvar*; Rama's exile; Kidnapping of Sita; the Rama-Ravan war and the conquest of Lanka; Rama's return to Ayodhya by Pushpak *viman*; crowning of Rama as king; abandonment of Sita by Rama and her stay at Valmiki's *ashram*; birth of Luv and Kush; Rama's *Aswamedhyagya*; arrival of Luv and Kush in Ayodhya; caving in of the earth and disappearance of Sita; enthronement of Luv and Kush.

The last king of the Raghuvansh was Agnivarn who was very licentious. As he suffered from consumption, his queen, who was in the family way, took the administration of the kingdom in her hands.

KUMARSAMBHAVA

The Himalayan mountain range in the north of India is known as Nagadhiraj or Devatatma. Here we find the pine and birch forests in their full majesty. The lakes at high altitudes are full of lotus flowers. It is the storehouse of many kinds of medicinal herbs.

Meena was the spouse of Parvatraj, the king of the Himalays. They had two children-Mainak, son and Parvati, daughter. In her previous birth, Parvati was the virtuous consort of Mahadev. She grew up to be a maiden of captivating beauty. Her big eyes were as beautiful as the blue lotus. A smile always played on her lips, like a white flower coming out of a red bloom. She was an embodiment of beauty and virtue.

Once Narad saw Parvati and he predicted that she would be married to Mahadev. Parvatraj took Parvati to the abode of Mahadev. She stayed there and spent her time in his service.

Once a throng of gods came to Brahma and sang hymns in his adoration. Brahma was pleased with them and wanted to know why they had come to him.

Brihaspati thus spoke: "Tarakasur got a boon from you. He has started molesting us. All of us, Surya, Chandra and Pawan, remain at his beck and call. Even then he pesters us. Our spouses are "kept in confinement by him. Please protect us from his cruelty."

Brahma told the gods that only the son of Mahadev could destroy the demon and they should bring about Mahadev's marriage with Parvati.

After the meeting was over, the gods returned to the heaven. Indra called Kamdev, the god of love, and asked him to arouse love for Parvati in the heart of Mahadev. In the spring, Kamadev with his spouse Rati departed for Mahadev's abode. Mahadev was sitting in *virasan* with his eyes closed in meditation. When he opened his eyes he saw Parvati and his heart was moved by her bewitching beauty. However, he controlled himself and pondered over the cause of his passion. When he raised his eyes, he noticed Kamdev standing there. This enraged him and he opened his third eye. There and then Kamdev was incinerated. Mahadev left that place. Parvati came back to her home. When Rati saw Kamadev burning to ashes, she fainted. When she came round, she thought of ending her life. At that time, a voice from the void said to her: "After some time you will be reunited with your husband. When Mahadev is pleased with Parvati's devotion and marries her, Kamdev will rise from the ashes." This message consoled Rati and she gave up the idea of ending her life.

Parvati made up her mind to please Mahadev by undertaking severe penance. Parvati's mother counselled her against such a course but could not shake Parvati's determination. Parvatraj allowed Parvati to do so.

Parvati discarded her finery and wore sack cloth, she knotted her hair, took Rudraksha counting beads in her hand and began to sleep on the earth, without a bed using her arms as a pillow.

Thus began her penance. In summer she used to light fire around her and spend all her time in the centre of the fire in meditation. During rainy days, she drank only rain-water. In the shivering cold of the winter, she used to meditate sitting in the icy water. It was very hard to live on the fallen leaves of the trees, but Parvati even stopped eating them and began to observe complete fast.

One day, a holy man came there. He saw the austerities observed by Parvati and asked many questions about the aim of

her penance. He said to Parvati, "You are the most beautiful creature in the three worlds. You belong to a noble family. You do not desire to go to the heaven. You only want a suitable spouse for yourself. Whom do you wish to marry that you subject yourself to such severe austerities?"

Parvati felt shy and did not reply. Her friend disclosed that Parvati was determined to marry Mahadev and none else; hence this penance.

When the holy man heard it, he ridiculed Mahadev and said, "Mahadev who wears no clothes, lives in the cremation ground, Ghosts and goblins are his companions, what virtue do you see in him that you should bear such discomforts?"

When Parvati heard this, anger seized her. In a tone full of anger, she said, "Stop it. I do not want to hear anything more."

No sooner did she say this, than she saw Mahadev standing there. The holy man had disappeared from the scene.

Mahadev said to Parvati, "Parvati, your true devotion has won my heart. I am now bounden to you."

Parvati was extremely glad to hear it.

Mahadev called the seven *rishis*. They came there with Arundhati. Mahadev sent them to Aushadhiprasth, the capital of the Himalayas. They asked Parvatraj to get Parvati married to Mahadev. Everyone approved the proposal.

After three days, Mahadev and Parvati were married in royal splendour. Aushadhiprasth was agog with joy. The fairies danced and staged dramas. The gods prayed to Mahadev to bring Kamdev to life again. Mahadev accepted their prayer and Kamadev was brought to life again.

Mahadev stayed with his in-laws for one month. Then he took leave of them and went to the Gandhamadan mountain, visiting the Meru, the Kailash, the Malayanandanvan en-route.

Here Mahadev and Parvati lived alone in quietude and no one could see them. The gods asked Agni to reach there by assuming the form of a pigeon. When Mahadev saw Agni in the form of a pigeon, he got very angry but immediately Agni appeared in his own form and begged Mahadev's forgiveness. Agni said to Mahadev, "All the gods are in wait for you, please let them have your *darshan*." Mahadev was pacified and appeared before the gods. After that he left for the Kailash.

In course of time, Parvati gave birth to Kartikeya, a son with six faces. Mahadev and Parvati rejoiced at the birth of Kartikeya and time swiftly passed on. He was a wonder of nature and on the sixth day after his birth, he became a full grown man, perfect in arts and learning and skilful in using weapons of war.

One day Indra and some gods quietly came to Mahadev in fear of Tarakasur. When Mahadev enquired about the cause of their fright, Indra narrated the tale of atrocities committed by Tarakasur on the gods. Mahadev was enraged on hearing about it and said to his son, "Tarakasur is an enemy of the gods; go and kill him."

The gods were over-joyed on hearing it.

Kartikeya paid obeisance to his parents and in the company of the gods, departed forthwith for the heaven. The gods hesitated at the gate of the heaven but Kartikeya told them not to be afraid and march on. They followed Kartikeya and entered the heaven. They were glad to see the *Akash-ganga* once again after a long time. Ahead was the *Nandanvan* where Tarakasur had wrought havoc by cutting and uprooting the trees. Amravati, the city of the heaven, was in a very bad shape. Its garden had been despoiled and its palaces demolished. Kartikeya was furious at this wanton destruction. Indra took Kartikeya to his Vijayanta Palace where the spouses of the gods greeted and blessed Kartikeya.

Preparations for war began. Kumar Kartikeya rode on the Vajitvar chariot, Indra on Airavat elephant, Yamaraj on the black buffalo, Varun on a salamander, Pawan on the flying deer, Kubera on a palanquin and the eleven Rudras on bulls. Nairit, the demon, who was displeased with Tarakasur and had deserted him to join Kartikeya, rode on the shoulders of a frenzied goblin.

The heavenly beings watched with delight the march of the godly forces down the Sumeru mountain, in the din and bustle of the neighing horses, trumpeting elephants and rattling chariots.

From the opposite direction, Tarakasur advanced with his forces. Evil signs appeared. The earth was shaken by an earthquake. Big and deep cracks appeared on the earth. In the sky, crows and hawks hovered. Snakes crossed the routes of the marching armies. A big, black snake coiled itself round the Tarakasur's flag and his chariot caught fire, but he was not discouraged and kept on advancing. A fierce battle took place when both the armies came face to face. The blood of warriors flowed in a stream under the thick shower of arrows flying both ways. Battles were fought in the sky, on the earth and on water. Ultimately, after much destruction, Tarakasur was killed and his forces flew in disarray.

Thus ended the chapter of cruelty written by Tarakasur and the gods once again lived in peace, happiness and bliss.

MEGHDOOT

The king of the *Yakshas* was called Kubera. Alakapuri was the capital of his kingdom. It was situated in the Himalays.

This incident took place long, long ago. One of the *Yakshas* was entrusted with the duty of bringing flowers to the king every morning. He was easy-going and fond of his wife. One day he chatted with his wife late into the night. Next morning he got up late. As a result, he was late in taking flowers to Kubera.

Kubera was very angry with the *Yaksha* and as a punishment, he banished the *Yaksha* from his kingdom for one year. The *Yaksha* left Alakapuri and went alone to the south. He made his abode on the Ramgiri mountain. The *Yaksha* was heart-broken and spent the first eight months of his exile, in extreme suffering. He longed to be with his wife.

It was the first of *Ashadha*. The rain-laden clouds hung in the sky and roused the waves of joy in the hearts of the living beings. Deep longings stirred in the hearts of the *Yaksha* and he felt very miserable, as he was separated from his wife by long distance and had yet to spend four more months in this wretched condition. He could not remain unmoved at his own pitiable condition.

In that state of mind, he spoke to a cloud, as if he was talking to a living being.

He thus addressed the cloud:

"O cloud, my brother, you give succour to the distressed. Kubera's anger banished me from my home. Here, far away from my home and wife, I am lonely and unhappy. O brother cloud, please help me and take my message to my wife."

Then the *Yaksha* instructed the cloud how to reach Alakapuri.

"Passing through Maladesh, Vindhyaachal, Vidisha, Ujjain, Brahmavart, Kurukshetra and Kankhal, climb up the Himalayas. In the Himalayas, you shall see many charming and beautiful places. Beyond them, rise higher to the Kailash, the abode of the gods. Here in its lap lies Alakapuri which you can identify by its magnificent palaces kissing the sky. The luminous women of Alakapuri are bewitching in their beauty and bedeck themselves with sweet scented, multi-coloured flowers to heighten their charm.

"My house is in the north of Kubera's palace. There you shall see a slim woman. Her small teeth are very beautiful. With her thin waist, red lips and eyes like those of a frightened dove; you can easily recognise my wife. Her beauty is captivating. She would be sitting there absorbed in my thoughts, or talking to the myna in its cage. Maybe she is found in shabby clothes with *veena* in her hand chanting my name.

"O brother cloud, speak thus to her; 'O Lady of Good Fortune, I am cloud, a dear friend of your husband. I bring a message for you from him. Cheer up; the days of banishment of your husband will be over by the next *Devuthni Ekadashi* when Shiva rises from his serpent bed."

The cloud started on its journey from Ramgiri mountain with the *Yaksha's* message. In a few days, crossing over hills, towns and rivers, the cloud arrived at Alakapuri. It followed the signs told by the *Yaksha* and found the *Yaksha's* house glistening like gold. Inside, the *Yaksha's* wife was lying prostrate on the floor. The cloud delivered the message to her.

When Kubera heard the news, he was moved with pity for the *Yaksha* and his wife. His anger dissipated and his heart melted with sympathy. He took back his word and reunited the separated lovers.

The book speaks about one of the greatest poets – Kalidas, his life, works and the anecdotes woven-round him, in a simple story form. Even the great works of Kalidas have been condensed and presented in a capsule form for the benefit of common readers. One may get numerous books on Kalidas, but this one is very handy, simple and informative.

The author, H.D.Bhatt ‘Shailesh’, is one of the modern Indian writers who pioneered fiction writing about mountaineering and mountain life. He has to his credit many books, short stories, features, one act plays and travelogues.



**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

ISBN : 81-230-1084-2

Price : Rs. 42.00